1. Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

221 Seasonal variation in quantity and kind of food is sociologically significant for several reasons, though not all are relevant to the present study. It is, however, important to note that abundance of millet is the main reason for holding ceremonies in the rains, for ritual is seldom complete without porridge and beer and, since it consists of sacrifice, of meat also. Weddings, initiation rites, and religious ceremonies of various kinds take place in the rains and early drought, generally after the first millet harvest. This is also the main season for [[21]] raiding the Dinka. Nuer say that hunger and war are bad companions and that they are too hungry to fight in the full dry season; and it is evident that they are then not so eager to come to blows over personal and community quarrels as they are in the rainy months, when they are replete with grain and meat and, especially at wedding dances, sometimes slightly intoxi- [[35]] cated. Nor do the young men find dancing so attractive in the drought, whereas in the rains they dance as much as possible and think nothing of travelling many miles to attend weddings, at which they dance from eventide till well into the morning. The tempo of village life is different from that of camp life. Owing to flooding at the height of the rains these joint activities take place mainly at the beginning and end—chiefly at the end —of the wet season.

264 574 Scarcity of food at times and the narrow margin that for most of the year divides sufficiency from famine cause a high degree of interdependence among members of the smaller local groups, which may be said to have a common stock of food. Although each household owns its own food, does its own cooking, and provides independently for the needs of its members, men, and much less, women and children, eat in one another's homes to such an extent that, looked at from outside, the whole community is seen to be partaking of a joint supply. Rules of hospitality and conventions about the division of meat and fish lead to a far wider sharing of food than a bare statement of the principles of ownership would suggest. Young men eat at all byres in the vicinity; every household gives beer parties which their neighbours and kinsmen attend; the same people are given food and beer at the co-operative work parties that assist in any difficult and laborious task; in camps it is

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

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A wedding dance

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2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

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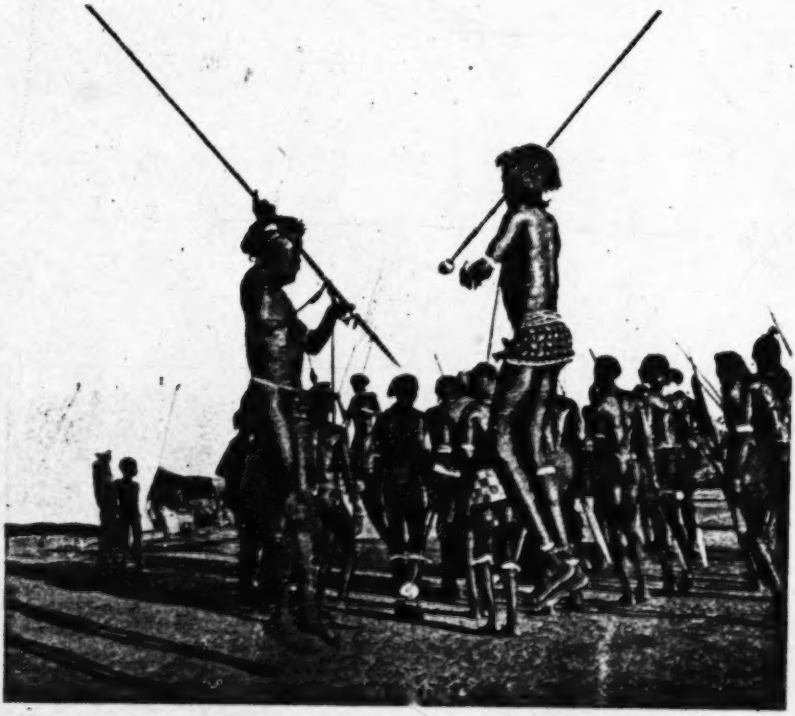

VIII. The leaping movement (*rau*) in a dance

[Facing page 144]

6: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1938
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

In a big camp there is often dancing at night and youths and girls pay evening visits to neighbouring camps to take part in the dances. There is a special dry season dance quite different from the drum dances of the wet season. It is called *dompiny*. A small hole is dug in the dancing place and a piece of hide is stretched tightly across it. A length of cord is stretched over the hide and is pegged on either side of it. A small stick is placed on the hide over the centre of the hole and the cord is supported by the top of the stick and slopes on either side of it to the ground. The cord is thus kept taught. The hole acts as a sounding box. The performer obtains music by striking the cord with a thin stick held in his right hand as he sits cross-legged before it and by muting it with his left hand or with a stick held in his left hand. By this means he produces rhythm. Sometimes another man beats at the same time with his hand on the hide near the sounding hole. The people dance and sing, men dancing opposite women. A man holds his hands above his head like an ox's horns and as he sings he steps backwards and the girls opposite him move towards him. They thus circle round the musical instrument.

Girls sometimes have their own singing parties in these camps. They sit and sing to a rhythm made by slapping their outstretched thighs. This is called *patpat*. Youths who are courting the girls often join them and take part in the singing. It is customary for young men to visit girls and court them when the day's work is done.

If there is no dancing at night—and in the smaller camps where there are few girls, and these mostly kinswomen, the young men do not care to start a dance—the inmates of the camp chat in their windscreens and at the thresholds of their huts for an hour or two after the evening meal and then fall off to sleep. Sometimes they chat till close on midnight and occasionally a man who is happy walks amid the cattle, ringing an ox-bell and singing for an hour or more. Sometimes an animal has strayed from the herd. Then everyone is sad and its owners are out in the bush till late at night searching for it.

One day in a Nuer cattle camp is like another. Calves are born and we see time passing in the stages of their growth. Nor does life

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

held by young people and has danced and 'flirted' with her for some time.[1] 584

Only the most important ritual and negotiations are recorded. Moreover it must be remembered that the form and order of ceremonial among primitive peoples usually vary considerably on each occasion, and no marriage ceremony is word for word, act for act, an exact repetition of another. Further, there may be local variations of custom.[2] It does not follow that all the ceremonies described below are necessarily performed in all Nuer marriages, nor that they are always performed with the same degree of ceremonial and publicity. Older men, especially men with many cattle, who already have other wives would think it unseemly to court a girl with the same intensity as would a younger Nuer, and they would not be expected to go through all the preliminaries.

Courting and Betrothal

When a Nuer youth has been accepted by a girl she will hasten to inform her family, provided she knows that her lover has sufficient cattle to legalize the union. It may be that her legal representatives in the family—that is, her more important male kinsmen—will ban the marriage from the start for some reason or other. Relations with the prospective bridegroom's family may already be strained, and they may have no desire to associate with it; there may even be blood between them (*teke riem kamdien*), or the memory of a blood feud. They may know at once that a marriage is precluded by the rules of exogamy. In such circumstances the girl will be discreetly told to avoid her lover in future. If, however, there is no objection she will be encouraged to continue and will receive their permission, though this is not made public. The first ceremony may then take place. This does not concern the older members of either family, and is confined to the prospective bride and bridegroom and their friends and coevals. It is in fact no more than a formal recognition among the younger people that the couple are courting, and it does not involve any legal negotiation. It is known in Nuer as *luom nyal.*

[1] Dances provide the best opportunity for flirtation and courting. In the normal pursuits of daily life the Nuer does not have much contact with girls except those who are related to him, and these he cannot marry. Dances, particularly big dances held in the rainy season, are usually attended by considerable numbers of people from different and unrelated lineages. These dances often lead to quarrels and violence and even bloodshed. Spirits are high, and for this reason tribal authorities (in the Zeraf tribes), representing the Government, sometimes attempt to ban dancing. This has not received the support of the Government, but it is worth noting that a ban on dancing would give the Nuer youth less chance to meet and flirt with a wide choice of girls which is undoubtedly a factor making for stability in marriage. 584 535

[2] My description of the ceremonial sometimes differs from the accounts given by Professor Evans-Pritchard. Where there is any great difference I have recorded it in a footnote, but it should be noted that his observations were made in Lou and Eastern Jikany, while mine are drawn from experiences among the Zeraf tribes and later among Western Nuer.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

THE WEDDING

585 But if all has gone well the day is set for the wedding
535 dance. The food is ready, word has been sent around that friends may come. The bridegroom and his people bring the cattle.

Girls in their grass skirts wearing every possible ornament are there. Men and boys, their bodies also ornamented as much as possible have come, carrying their spears and clubs, and some few with guns. From a distance the dance looks like a huge cloud of dust, but as one nears the scene the glint of spears is seen as the men run and jump up and down advancing upon some imaginary foe. The men dance in a mass formation, high jumping being a characteristic feature. The girls also dance in a group by themselves, led by the bride. They circle around the group of dancing men, but do not dance with them.

The bride leads the girls in the dance, facing them, which necessitates her dancing with her back to the mass of dancing men. One wonders how they manage to keep from being speared or from spearing some one in this crowd.

585 After the dance the feast is held, and then this part of the marriage ceremony is over.

Possibly the same night of the dance, but more likely several days later, the bridegroom asks that the bride be brought to his village. Her girl friends accompany her, timing their arrival so that it may be evening when they arrive at his village. They are attired in their dancing skirts.

A house is given the bridegroom for himself and bride; another house is given the girl guests who have accompanied the bride.

The bride gives her husband's family all her ornaments. She is not allowed to keep a single one of them.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

down in groups of four each, and the player who picked 524
up the one ball out of the last group finds that he has three in his last group now, while the other player who took three balls out of the last group is amazed to find that his last group now contains but one. They play it over and over again and enjoy it each time, but cannot explain it.

One boy was seen to do a trick quite cleverly by changing a mud-ball from one hand to another much to the amazement of his friends.

Another game is played with mud-balls in which points are scored as cattle with which to buy a wife. The Nuer enjoy this game very much, but they assure me it is far too difficult for me to learn and much beyond my feminine comprehension.

Boys make a ring of cane-leaves and then throw it, trying to throw a stick through it as it rolls.

They also play a game resembling shinny, and are quite clever at it.

Girls often play a game with pieces of cane-stalk about eight or ten inches long. One throws them on the ground and the way in which the different sticks fall indicates how many cattle will be paid as the marriage price; other points count as different things pertaining to the marriage. The pieces are thrown again and again, some positions in which they fall indicating the loss of a cow.

The girls play a game in which the hands are repeatedly clapped on the knees, and they chant a little song as they clap.

Little girls play house, pounding up clods of earth for dura, sifting it in order to get coarse particles out, and imitating their mothers in their work about the home.

On moonlight nights, the dance is a favourite amuse- 535 ●
ment of both children and young people. A drum is made, 534
possibly out of an old kerosene tin which has had the ends

535 cut out and sheepskin pulled tightly over it, or it may be
534 a large gourd with a sheepskin covering, or possibly it is made of a piece of the trunk of a tree, hollowed out and covered with sheepskin. But whatever its construction it emits enough sound to please any Nuer when it is beaten in the dance. The drummer beats a rather steady, rhythmic tune on it. One person usually chants a line of a song while all the other dancers chant an alternate line which serves as a chorus.

535 The dance is a group formation. Couples do not dance together.

The men run in in a long line and dance in a group. High jumping is a feature and one is amazed at the height they achieve. Quick advances upon an imaginary foe are made with much brandishing of spears.

One girl leads the group of girls, facing them and leading them as they advance and retreat before her. They keep time to the music with a quick movement of the head and hips.

534 A fiddle is made of a large piece of wood which has been hollowed out, or of a half-gourd, sheepskin being tightly laced over it. Strings are made of gut, and one can play as many as four different notes on some of the fiddles. While the player plays a tune on the strings of the fiddle he keeps up a steady, low accompaniment by thrumming the bowl of the fiddle with the fingers of the other hand.

533 Nuer are naturally musical, and many of them are quite good singers. They improvise many of their songs as occasion requires. Many of their songs pertain to marriage, many of them laud cattle or persons and proclaim their praises. Sometimes they voice their disapproval of some individual in song so that all may hear. They have a lullaby for babies also. Some of their songs are of a

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

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Fig. 3
Cliff's dancing-stick

taking part in fishing battues. Such a man is called *gwan biedh*, owner of fish-spear, and *kuaar jusini*, priest of grass, because he protects the people by winding grass round the point of a fishing-spear which he then drives into the earth. He also fills a snail-shell with mud and presses it into the mud of the river, and he bends and binds together the points of a metal bracelet and stamps it into the mud. He may also bind a goat and place it in the river as a sacrifice to the river-spirit, which he calls on to protect the people against the dangers of the water. I was told that he must not himself take part in the fishing, but must sit on the bank and abstain from drinking water. He can also heal wounds caused by fish-spears by spitting in them. The Gaatiek clan is probably of Dinka origin.

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The Nyanding river in the eastern Jikany country is the totem of a small lineage of Anuak descent who live on its banks. It is said that once upon a time the river-spirit asked for a bride, and a girl was decked for marriage and thrown into it by her father Juac, whose name means 'grass' in Nuer. This girl who was sacrificed to the river-spirit (*ca je kok yir*) was called Nyanding. I was told that 'she was not drowned, the river took her', and that she became part of the river-spirit. The present 'owner' of the river, Monytuk Joak, a man of this lineage, told me that each year he binds a goat and throws it into the river. He also protects people taking part in large-scale fishing by treating a bracelet and a shell in the manner I have described. When a girl of the lineage is married, a male goat and a female goat are paid as part of the bridewealth. The male goat is sacrificed to the river-spirit and the female goat is dedicated to it.

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Some Nuer lineages respect cattle with certain markings. The Kwok lineage of western Nuerland and their kinsmen among the Atwot people (a section of the Nuer who have to a large extent adopted Dinka culture) will not keep in their herds an animal with *ma ferag* markings, that is an animal which has a coloured back but is otherwise white. If one is calved by their cows they

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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PLATE IV

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Movement in wedding dance

[facing p. 112]